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ABSTRACT

This document outlines the major points of the first annual status report of the Spencerport (New York) More Effective Schools/Teaching Project. Section 1 contains a list of 15 basic principles and assumptions upon which the project is based. Section 2 presents three conclusions drawn at the end of the first year and a half of the project. First, the effective schools research is applicable at all levels of a suburban school system. Second, vital dialogs have developed among participating building staffs. Third, schools should follow an eight-part process in implementing an effective schools project: (1) awareness, (2) inservice, (3) project design, (4) needs assessment, (5) formulation of building plans, (6) implementation, (7) evaluation, and (8) planning for subsequent years. Section 3 lists correlates (such as a safe and orderly environment and a clear school mission) that are an area of strength for participating buildings. Section 4 defines effectiveness, reports on achievement results in math and reading at the end of the first year, and describes the project's concomitant goal, directed toward above-average student achievement. (IW)

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MEMORANDUM

October 5, 1984

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Robert E. Sudlow

TOPIC: More Effective Schools/Teaching Project
Executive Summary of the First Annual Report

I

Basic Principles

During the spring of 1983 the Leadership Planning Team developed a list of the major research findings, principles and assumptions upon which the More Effective Schools/Teaching Project is based. These assumptions are an integral part of the district's Master Plan. They are:

1. Virtually all students are educable when educability is defined as pupil acquisition of basic school skills.

2. Research concludes that the school effects are more powerful than familial effects. This conclusion must not be taken to mean that there is no familial effect in pupil acquisition of academic skills. In some families, background does not limit a student's ability to acquire basic school skills; but some families can enhance student achievement well beyond basic school skills.

3. a. Annually the goal of education for each youth is to bring him or her to at least the standard of minimum academic performance for that grade level so that he or she can perform successfully in the next grade.

   b. Further, the goal of education is to prepare students so that they can make as many choices as possible. Thus upon graduation from high school all students should be able, as a result of their education, to choose whether or not to enter college, or to attend another form of post high school education, or to obtain a job.

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4. There is a positive correlation between academic student achievement and staff expectations.

5. An emphasis upon learning, upon academic achievement, is the prime purpose of public education.

6. Teachers and principals can and do make a key difference in the quality of education each child receives.

7. A school building is a complex social system with a set of norms, beliefs and patterns of behavior which can facilitate or hinder learning.

8. Collaborative, cooperative, collegial, supportive, noncoercive planning especially at the building level and accompanied by support from District Office personnel is the key approach to improvement.

9. The building principal has a key role in establishing the climate of his or her building.

10. Change is a process, a series of related events. It is not one event.

11. Ideal change fosters ownership and commitment by all participants.

12. In many ways, the schools in this district are effective. The challenge is to make them more effective.

13. This project affects all school personnel.

14. Because the climate of a school is dependent upon all of its occupants, the individual school building as a whole is the strategic unit for planned change. To obtain change, attention must be paid to the culture of the school; focusing on the behavior of individual teachers or students is not sufficient.

15. Focusing on effective schools research may necessitate realignment of other priorities within the building.

II

Conclusions

At the end of the first year and a half of operation, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The effective schools research is applicable to a suburban school system and at all levels of a suburban school system. It provides a most powerful model for studying and developing plans to improve a school.

2. As a result of the project, dialogue in each building has centered around educationally significant topics.

3. A definite process which schools should follow in installing and implementing an effective schools project is emerging. Briefly, it is:

Stage	Description
I	Awareness
II	Inservice
III	Project Design
IV	Needs Assessment
V	Formulation of Building Plans
VI	Implementation
VII	Evaluation
VIII	Subsequent years -- recycle to Stage V

III

Correlates

Teacher and administrator responses to the Connecticut School Interview indicate that there are a number of correlates which can be considered as areas of strength. The criteria for this determination is a response of two-thirds (66%) or more to items D & E (or A & B if the question is worded negatively) on the interview form.

The correlates which are an area of strength for each building are:

Bernabi

Safe and Orderly Environment
Clear School Mission
High Expectations
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
Home-School Relations

Munn

Clear School Mission
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

Town Line

Safe and Orderly Environment
Clear School Mission
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

Cosgrove

None

Wilson

None

IV

Achievement

At the end of the first year of a multi-year project it can not be said with any degree of certainty that changes in student achievement are attributable to the project. It can be said that these changes in achievement occurred at the same time the project started.

Nevertheless with this caution in mind it still is important to examine achievement data since the key goal of the project is to attain effectiveness. Effectiveness is defined as follows:

Ninety-five or greater, percent of all students at each grade level shall demonstrate minimum academic mastery. There shall be no significant difference in the proportions of youth demonstrating minimum academic mastery as a function of socio-econcomic class. These two conditions shall have been obtained for a minimum of three consecutive years.

Should a school building not be effective, there shall be an annual increase in the proportion of students who demonstrate minimum academic mastery, and there shall be an annual decrease in the proportion of youth demonstrating minimum academic mastery as a function of socio-economic class.

Based upon the above definition, the following achievement results were observed at the end of the first year.

For Reading:

1. Improvement occurred in two elementary schools.

2. Partial improvement occurred in one elementary school.

3. Improvement did not occur in the junior high school.

4. The high school is effective for two consecutive years.

For Math:

1. Improvement occured in one elementary school.

2. Partial improvement occurred in one elementary school and the junior high school.

3. Improvement did not occur in one elementary school.

4. The high school was effective the first year and almost effective the second year.

For the subject areas of social studies, science, writing, language, listening and English:

1. At Cosgrove improvement occurred only in Listening. Otherwise improvement did not occur.

2. Wilson was effective for two consecutive years -- this is most impressive!!

The project also has a Concomitant Goal directed towards above average student achievement. It should be noted that the Master Plan for the project calls only for the Concomitant Goal data to be monitored. Prime attention is to be devoted to attaining effectiveness.

Six measures of the Concomitant Goal indicated that it had been attained; twelve measures indicated that it had not been attained. However, this data analysis revealed that in twelve areas approximately one-third to one-half of the students attained scores indicative of above average academic performance. This is most impressive!

V

Appreciation

Most important of all, this project to examine the implications of significant new research could not have occurred without the active efforts and leadership of those who served on the Building Planning Teams and the Leadership Planning Team. Their willingness to examine new research findings which is some cases may challenge current assumptions is deeply appreciated.

Likewise it must be said that the support of the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education is crucial and deeply appreciated.